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SUBJECT: CHAIRMAN LUGAR'S CALL ON SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT  
OGTAY ASADOV

REF: BAKU 1146

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During Chairman Lugar's August 21 call on Speaker of Parliament Ogtay Asadov, the Speaker outlined the U.S.- Azerbaijani bilateral relationship, and spoke highly of the work of the U.S.- Azerbaijani Inter-Parliamentary Working Group. Chairman Lugar shared his experience in the U.S. Senate, and highlighted the important role that Parliament could play in Azerbaijan's democratic development. He emphasized the importance of providing Members of Parliament (MPs) with adequate resources to enable them to communicate with their constituents and to effectively perform their jobs. Asadov said that Parliament is in the process of developing, and after renovations to the Parliament building are complete, staffing issues can be addressed. The Speaker defended Azerbaijan's electoral process, arguing that the country is still a developing democracy and that there is gradual improvement with each election. Chairman Lugar noted that many Azerbaijanis are working to improve the electoral process, and said that the U.S. would continue to note and applaud Azerbaijan's progress. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) In Chairman Lugar's August 21 meeting with Speaker of Parliament Ogtay Asadov, the Speaker outlined the U.S.- Azerbaijani relationship, and spoke highly of President Aliyev's visit to Washington. He pointed out that Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to contribute troops to the Global War on Terror, and said that the GOAJ had agreed to assist because Azerbaijan had been subjected to terrorist attacks by Armenia. Asadov spoke of the success of the U.S.- Azerbaijani partnership in creating the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, but expressed frustration with the status of the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku Railway project, saying that the U.S. had decided to not fund the project because of influence from the Armenian lobby. The Speaker brought up the U.S.- Azerbaijani Inter-Parliamentary Working Group, and said that the friendship of this group and high-level visits to Azerbaijan, such as those of Chairman Lugar, play an important role in developing the overall bilateral relationship.

¶3. (SBU) Chairman Lugar praised Azerbaijan's economic development, and urged Asadov to help reform Azerbaijan's political process as well. He spoke of his own experience in the U.S. Senate, and explained how the U.S. Congress functions as a check and balance on the Executive Branch. Pointing out that each branch of government is working on the same team, Chairman Lugar highlighted the need for Parliament to strengthen and develop, and said that Azerbaijan's development in other sectors would proceed more rapidly with a stronger, more efficient legislature. (Note: Media were present during Chairman Lugar's initial comments regarding the importance of a strong legislature). Chairman Lugar emphasized the need for MPs to be provided with adequate resources: staff members, office space, and equipment such as

telephones, fax machines, and computers. He said that in the U.S., these resources allow him to communicate with his constituents, who, by electing him, allowed him to serve in the Senate in the first place. To illustrate the importance of an effective legislature, Chairman Lugar spoke of U.S. agricultural reforms, noting that the reforms had been made possible by legislators listening and actively responding to their constituents.

¶4. (C) Chairman Lugar inquired about the status of staff members, office space, and equipment for MPs. The Speaker responded that, because the Parliament building is under renovation, there is not currently space for "personal" staff members. He said that MPs currently have access to communal staff members, and that after the Parliament building is renovated, construction will begin on a new office building, after which staffing issues can be addressed. (Note: Currently, Parliament has only committee staff, two per each of Parliament's eleven commissions.) Asadov admitted that Parliament's resources are weak, but said that the MPs want to develop and are working towards progress. Asadov also discussed notions that Azerbaijan's Parliament is controlled by the President's Office. Asadov argued that this is not the case, and said that the two branches of government work in "close cooperation."

¶5. (C) Asadov raised the November 2005 Parliamentary Elections, asserting that eighty percent of those who observed the elections had a negative impression of the events. He expressed frustration, and argued that the GOAJ accepted all of the international community's pre-elections proposals, including finger-inking. Asadov said that the GOAJ also cooperated after the elections by invalidating the results in ten electorates, and holding re-run elections in

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May 2006. He said that Azerbaijan is a developing democracy, and is gradually improving its electoral process. Chairman Lugar said that after his visit to the country in September 2005, he had been impressed with the work of the newly-established Central Election Commission, and that in his opinion, there are many individuals in Azerbaijan working to improve the electoral process. He said that the U.S. values its relationship with Azerbaijan, and that the USG will continue to "notice and applaud" each development.

¶6. (U) CODEL Lugar did not have the opportunity to review this message.  
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